

Congressman Renews Call for Immediate Up or Down Vote on Bipartisan Senate Bill

Washington, DC -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today voted to defeat legislation that failed to provide adequate funding for ongoing emergency disaster relief related to Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee and other natural disasters across the country. President Obama has requested \$6.9 billion in funding for FEMA to continue relief in response to natural disasters throughout the country. The bill, supported by House Republican leadership, would have only provided \$3.65 billion for FEMA and other relief efforts, while doing nothing for farmers. Hinchey is continuing to fight for an up or down vote in the House on the comprehensive, bipartisan Senate package, which meets the president's request while also providing badly needed support for Department of Agriculture programs that provide emergency relief to farmers.

"This legislation failed to meet the needs of New Yorkers and others across this country who have been devastated by natural disasters," said Hinchey. "It was a half measure that would have caused FEMA and other agencies to run out of funding, delaying aid to families, small businesses and farmers that have been affected by Irene and Lee. It provided no relief to farmers, and it shortchanged other agencies that are helping us rebuild after these devastating storms. I'm pleased that it was defeated so that we can quickly bring a better bill to the floor."

Yesterday, Hinchey led a group of 77 House members in calling on Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Cantor to schedule an up or down vote on comprehensive, bipartisan legislation that meets FEMA's funding needs, supports farmers and has already passed the U.S. Senate. Unlike the House bill, which attached disaster relief funding to a broader bill to fund the federal government, the Senate bill is a simple, standalone measure that ensures emergency funding does not get delayed by the complicated political, poisonous budget debate.

"We can't afford gridlock and inaction, but that's exactly what we're getting as a result of the decision to entangle disaster relief with the debate over the budget and offsets," said Hinchey. "Eight times under the Bush administration, the House passed legislation with broad Republican support to fund emergency relief in the aftermath of disasters. This time should be no different. Instead, it's looking more and more likely that New Yorkers will not get the immediate assistance they need because Washington is mucking things up with this debate over the deficit. We need a simple, clean vote on emergency disaster relief. Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Cantor need to bring this issue to the floor for a vote."

Damage from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee badly affected New York's 22nd Congressional District, which Hinchey represents. Throughout the Southern Tier, damage is estimated at more than \$250 million. In the Hudson Valley, Hurricane Irene caused massive power outages and record flooding. In Ulster County, 60 percent of residents lost power, seven bridges were destroyed. In fact, two of those bridges were just washed away and not found. Farmers in Ulster, Orange and Sullivan counties suffered devastating losses and because the crop insurance program remains inadequate for them, these farmers may get no assistance at all. Ulster and Orange counties alone have an estimated \$62.5 million in agriculture losses, yet the House bill contains no assistance for farmers.

Hinchey was one of the first in Congress to call for additional appropriations to assist those affected by Hurricane Irene, and Tropical Storm Lee. In an August 29 press release, Hinchey said "congressional action will also be necessary to increase funding for the President's Disaster Relief Fund." Today, that fund contains less than \$400 million and is set to run into the red unless Congress takes action by the end of the month.

Hinchey has also worked to deliver the federal disaster declarations necessary for New Yorkers to receive the federal assistance they need. Last week, Hinchey spoke with FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate to request expedited Major Disaster Declarations for New York counties affected by Tropical Storm Lee. Prior to that, Hinchey requested Federal Emergency Declarations for six New York counties affected by Lee. The designation was subsequently granted, making federal resources available to mitigate flood damage, save lives, protect property and public infrastructure, and ensure public health and safety. Hinchey has also introduced legislation and has been working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to expedite and provide additional assistance to farmers affected by the flooding and is supportive of efforts to provide crop insurance retroactively to New York farmers in need.